

## ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

### Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Select Committee held on 17 January 2012 commencing at 7 pm

Present: Cllr. Bosley (Chairman)  
Cllr. Grint (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Ayres, Mrs. Bayley, Butler, Ms. Chetram, Eyre, Mrs. Purves, Mrs. Sargeant and Searles.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Cooke, Edwards-Winser, London, Maskell, Ryan, Scholey and Williamson.

Cllrs. Mrs. Davison and Hogarth were also present.

#### 29. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Select Committee held on 25 October 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### 30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

#### 31. FORMAL RESPONSE FROM THE CABINET FOLLOWING MATTERS REFERRED BY THE COMMITTEE AND/OR REQUESTS FROM THE PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE (Report No. 3)

- (a) 2012/13 Budget and Review of Service Plans (*Response from Cabinet – 8 December 2011*)

The response from Cabinet was noted.

#### 32. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING (Item No. 4)

There were no actions from the previous meeting.

#### 33. FUTURE BUSINESS, THE WORK PLAN 2011/12 (Report No. 5)

The Committee discussed the Work Plan. Members noted the reasons set out at Minute 38 below, for the Development Management DPD not being presented until the March 2012 meeting. In light of this and the Sevenoaks Residential Character Assessment report being presented in March, it was felt prudent to move Excessive Street Furniture, Railways and Trains (Southern and South-Eastern operators), Edenbridge CAMP and the Local Listing Update to June 2012. The Committee discussed and agreed to request an update report on arrangements for the Olympics and Paralympics to be presented to the June 2012 meeting.

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### 34. BUS SERVICES (Item No. 6)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Daniel Washington, Public Transport Planner from Kent County Council (KCC), and the following representatives from Bus Operators in the district: Robert Patterson from Arriva; Brian Wharf and Austin Blackburn from Go Coach; and Norman Kemp from Nu Venture.

The Public Transport Planner (KCC) reported that as a result of a comprehensive spending review, Kent Highway Services had been restructured, with a 20% reduction in staffing and budget. As a direct result of a reduction in funding from central government, the use of concessionary fares had been put back from 9.00a.m. to 9.30a.m. The budget for local supported bus services had also been reduced, which resulted in the 409 being withdrawn from the district, but much of this service was duplicated by the 477. There had also been a reduction in the 'Bus Service Operation Grant', which meant that bus operators would receive 20% less rebate on fuel tax from April 2012. So there were three key issues: the reduction in the concessionary fare funding; reduction in the budget for the supported bus services; and the reduction in the bus service operation grant. At the moment the 'Freedom Pass' was unaffected. KCC had undertaken ongoing replacement and upgrading of bus stops across the network, especially around Edenbridge and Swanley, which would be completed by the end of the financial year.

A number of Members were concerned by the use of concessionary fares being moved to 9.30a.m. and commented on the difficulty this caused for users to make hospital appointments for example. They also expressed concern at the potential knock on cost implications for the NHS as a result of missed appointments.

In response to questions, the Public Transport Planner (KCC) responded that real time information digital displays were dictated by funding, and in practice tended to be introduced as a result of developer contributions. Subject to funding it would be looked into for appropriate main locations such as train stations. He also explained that the refurbishment of bus stops had consisted of cleaning them up, and replacement of graphics, tiles and timetables which was more cost effective than buying new ones. An increase in patronage had already been noted in a number of areas as a result of the refurbishments and new timetables.

Mr Robert Patterson – Business Development Manager for Arriva gave a short presentation to the Committee. He reported that Arriva operated in the district from their Tunbridge Wells Depot and were owned by the Deutsche Bahn Group. There were forty five buses at the depot, one hundred drivers, twelve engineers, six managers and supervisors and that they serviced 3.8 million passengers in the Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks area a year. Arriva (previously Maidstone & District) was currently celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of operation.

Extra journeys had been added to off peak 452 journeys. They had reinstated the 402 route via the Weald in September 2011 thanks to contributions from KCC and County Councillor Chard's Members Highway Fund. In response to passenger requests and the change in concessionary fares, they had amended the 432 timetable moving one journey forward to 9.30 a.m. They had recently bought five new vehicles costing in the region of £120,000 each for the Tunbridge Wells to Bromley 402 route, and had been cooperating with other bus operators in the district on the PlusBus Scheme. This was a cheap bus pass (like a travelcard) that you

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could buy with your train ticket at any station ticket office which gave you bus travel to and from the rail station. It was hoped that this would be implemented in the district by May 2012. He reported that they had voiced concerns with the Council regarding the issuing of civil enforcement notices on their buses and were hoping to work with the Council for a speedy resolution.

In response to a question concerning the use of mini buses in more rural areas at off peak times, he explained that where possible single deck buses were used but without areas to park mini buses larger buses were the only option due to timetabling issues and peak times. With reference to the 477 Swanley to Dartford route, a Member reported that many constituents had reported that drivers were driving past stops when not full, and many people had been unsuccessful in attempting to contact Arriva to complain. Mr. Patterson expressed great disappointment and requested details to be passed to him so that this may be investigated. He gave the Committee the following complaints contact number, 0844 800 4411, and offered his personal details to the Member concerned.

Mr. Brian Wharf of Go Coach, advised that this was his first Council meeting. They were a small company formed three and a half years ago consisting of fourteen vehicles and nine routes. Half of the service was commercial and the rest operated under KCC funding as school routes. In the last year the main significant change was that the 401 Sevenoaks to Westerham Monday to Saturday had been branded a county link and was operating commercially. All their non school routes operated low floor vehicles which was not unusual for small operations. They had invested in smart ticket machines and smartcard technology, as had a number of operators. They were extending the 409 service in the afternoons to Dartford started at Knole Academy and had terminated at Wilmington but they had found some pupils were being left at Hextable. There were only six regular passengers on the extended route but they were sure it would increase. The 412 route had also been extended up to West Kingsdown to help with overloading on the 403.

As a company they ran their own ticket initiatives, such as the 'early bird' ticket which allowed concessionary fare passengers to board outside of the concessionary times for only £1, which had proved very successful. They were working with Knole Academy to appoint an apprentice engineer in the summer, and had two special needs staff whose community care wardens were helping integrate them into the workplace as cleaners. Attempts to keep up with the modern age meant they had a Facebook page which kept passengers updated with any travel problems or bus delays, and had a Blackberry Instant messaging page which proved popular with the school children. Mr Wharf also voiced concerns on buses receiving parking penalty notices, and advised that drivers needed somewhere to rest but were constrained by services timetabled by KCC.

The Head of Environmental Services advised Members that buses were getting penalty charge notices because they were parking illegally. The bus stops were for drop off and pick up only, not for parking or leaving the vehicles unattended for long periods of time. Sevenoaks train station now had two bus stands but a solution still needed to be found for Swanley town centre. The Chairman undertook to request the Leader of the Council to copy the other bus operators in on all correspondence and meetings concerning this issue.

*ACTION 1: All local bus operators to be copied in on correspondence*

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*concerning the issuing of penalty charge notices on bus stops.*

Mr. Norman Kemp from Nu Venture introduced himself to the Committee. He had previously worked for bus operators within the district, and was now the owner of Nu Venture which was a Maidstone based company with forty five vehicles. He mainly operated in mid kent with KCC and Medway Council under competitive tendering services but had recently moved back into Sevenoaks with the 404 route up to Edenbridge and via Ide Hill, Sevenoaks and Plaxtol. This route was a rural route but required a single decker bus and a mini bus would only be possible if there were somewhere to park it when the single decker was needed for peak times. As a company they encouraged the use of regular drivers on the same journeys as it helped build a relationship between drivers and passengers which proved useful when facing problems such as road works. He also expressed concern at the lack of bus stands, especially during school holidays where drivers often made good time and needed to wait around. They had also invested in high tech ticketing systems. He believed that local bus services catering for the varied needs of passengers was the only way to continue and that demand-responsive schemes could undermine commercial operators.

A Member asked whether bus operators had been involved in discussions for transport links in light of the proposed amalgamation of the Kent and Medway Hospitals. The Public Transport Planner (KCC) reported that he was aware of the merger but that there had been no specific discussions with regards to bus service provision. Mr. Kemp highlighted the problems experienced at Pembury which he blamed on the lack of consultation with local bus operators and hoped the same mistake would not be made here.

Cllr. Hogarth, addressed the Committee as a member of Sevenoaks Town Council. He wanted to make the bus operators aware of the potential opportunities within the town especially the creation of better links from the train station to the centre to provide a more comprehensive service. He advised that Sevenoaks was not a minor tourist attraction, benefitting from Knole House, The Stag Theatre and growing nightlife, with more opportunities of bringing more people into the town from the local catchment area.

The Public Transport Planner (KCC) advised that the Council should consider the Quality Bus Partnership scheme, which would be an excellent discussion forum between the Council and the bus operators. Such agreements were operating in a number of district councils in Kent. It was an agreement between the principal bus company, Kent County Council and the district council aiming to develop all aspects of bus travel and to increase the number of passengers using bus services, with the aim of bringing about significant improvements in the quality of bus services in the county. Investing in improvements such as bus lanes and bus priority at traffic lights. He was happy to provide further information.

A Member commented that the new and refurbished bus stops were greatly appreciated in Edenbridge and that more people were using them thanks to the timetables. She warned that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 funding could not be relied on as the district was not an area of intense development.

The Chairman thanked the Public Transport Planner (KCC) and Bus Operator representatives for attending.

35. GATWICK AIRPORT MASTER PLAN – SDC CONSULTATION RESPONSE  
(Report No. 7)

The report set out a proposed response to a draft Gatwick Airport master plan, which looked forward to 2020. The plan proposed that passenger throughput at the airport would increase to 40 million passengers per annum by 2020. The draft response to the consultation noted that the airport played a key role in the South East economy but raised concerns about access to the airport and the noise impacts of any increase in the number of flights. The draft response also suggested that the need for increased capacity for international travel in the South East should be assessed by Government and that any proposals for a second runway at Gatwick prior to this would be unwelcome. The Senior Planning Officer advised that the consultation deadline had expired but that an extension had been granted in order to be able to bring this forward to the Committee for consideration.

The Chairman congratulated Edenbridge Town Council on their excellent response. In response to a question the Senior Planning Officer advised that whilst the master plan noted that under the terms of the Airport's legal agreement, £1 million annually should be spent on public transport initiatives, he was not aware of how this money was currently spent. The response suggested that some of the money should be used to support and promote a reintroduced train service between Tonbridge and Gatwick. The Master Plan also noted that a coach service between the airport and Kent would be introduced. The Senior Planning Officer was unaware of the details of this route but would speak to the Public Transport Planner at KCC to see if he had any further information.

*ACTION 2: Officers to investigate the details of the coach service between Gatwick and Kent proposed in the draft Gatwick Airport Master Plan.*

Resolved: That the response as set out in the report, be agreed by the Portfolio Holder and sent to the Gatwick Airport operator as the Council's comments on the draft master plan.

36. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK TIMETABLE (Report No. 8)

The report explained the need to amend the timetable for publishing the Allocations and Development Management Development Plan Document (DPD) to take full account of the final version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and enable further consideration to be given to key development sites. This would be a delay of five months and move approval of the plan for publication to July rather than February 2012. The report also covered other changes to the Local Development Framework (LDF) timetable, including the production of a Charging Schedule for the Community Infrastructure Levy and planning for gypsies and travellers.

In response to a query, the Planning Service Manager explained that if the NPPF was not published in April there was some degree of flexibility, but if the position was still uncertain by May the further consideration would need to be given as to how to respond.

Resolved: That Cabinet be recommended to agree the revised Local Development Scheme as set out in Appendix A to the report.

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THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.29 P.M.

Chairman